

General Synod Nine – 1973

Ecumenical Stance of the United Church of Christ

I. THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATION AND CALL

Humanity is broken and divided yet one. The Church of Jesus Christ is broken and divided yet one. The ecumenical commitment of the Church to mission and unity is to symbolize through its worship, its communal and structural life, and its work in the world the Christian union which points toward the larger union of creation. Its task is to work in effective mission to heal dehumanizing divisions and to realize more fully the universal human community which is proclaimed in the reality and the hope of the Kingdom of God.

The ultimate personal identity of each individual is that of a human being, created and loved by God, and part of His universal family. Our identities as individual members and as churches in the corporate life of the United Church of Christ are fragmental identities, necessary but provisional. The task our Lord Jesus Christ sets before us is to realize more fully in our churchly symbols, common life, ecclesiastical structures, and mission the ultimate union of creation, to point with gratitude and to participate where possible in those places where God's spirit is at work in the world making life whole. To the end that the union and wholeness of God's creation may be affirmed, we believe the effective union and wholeness of Christ's Church is intended.

We affirm, therefore, the description of the nature and shape of unity recommended to the Churches by the Third Assembly in New Delhi of the World Council of Churches:

“We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into ONE fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.”

We call the whole Church and the communion to which we belong to the task of giving full witness to the continuing process of uniting in ways known and to be made known to us.

Ecumenical commitment and involvement, even as all Christian life, involve costs of time, energy, and fundamental risk. Nevertheless, ecumenicity is not an option for us; rather it is a mandate that prohibits a restrictive view that would separate mission from unity, or unity from mission. Whenever we view ecumenicity as mainly cooperative planning and action rather than as the name for those active steps toward the goal of church union for the union of all humankind, we trap ourselves in the false dichotomy of mission vs. unity or unity vs. mission. The goal is the union of the church and the union of creation, and mission and unity are the processes to be followed in reaching the goal. We affirm that these belong

irrevocably together in God's order.

We confess our need to understand more fully the demands of the gospel in a world of conflicting demands. We need to clarify those demands, particularly as they relate to church union and the union of all creation. We need to provide guidelines, in light of the gospel imperatives for mission and unity, for choosing among the various ecumenical models according to their functions.

We believe that such policy and clarity are built on theological foundations.

II. ACTIONS

In the light of the above theological affirmation and call, the Ninth General Synod adopts the following policies and processes for use as they apply throughout the fellowship of the United Church of Christ.

1. The Ninth General Synod declares its *recognition of members and ministers of other Christian Churches as members and ministers* of the Church of Jesus Christ, and particularly those who are related to communions involved in the Consultation on Church Union. Conferences, Associations and churches of the United Church of Christ are requested to make this recognition tangible.
2. The Ninth General Synod pledges itself to strengthen the mission and witness of *the conciliar movement* as expressing the wholeness of Christ's Church.
 - a. The Ninth General Synod urges Instrumentalities throughout the Church to commit their resources and staffs . to the work of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, particularly so that the recently adopted structures of the Council may have a fair chance to succeed;
 - b. The Ninth General Synod supports the allocation of the *minimum askings* for the central budgets of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ for 1974 and 1975;
 - c. The Ninth General Synod declares that conciliar groups must be encouraged by responsible judicatory leaders at all levels to become representative of the widest possible range of judicatory structures to become recognized vehicles for the theological, structural, and experimental efforts in the process of growing together recommended by the Consultation on Church Union and to be arenas for planning, strategy, and judicatory decision-making.
3. The Ninth General Synod looks with favor on the possibility of *Roman Catholic membership* in conciliar ecumenism everywhere, and encourages all parts of the United Church of Christ to engage in dialogue and cooperative action with the Roman Catholic Church.
4. The Ninth General Synod declares its support for *coalitions, consortia, and clusters* as appropriate vehicles for specific inter-church programs and projects and conciliar organizations.

5. The Ninth General Synod declares its commitment to the process of growing together represented in the *Consultation on Church Union* and is determined to press forward with vigor in deeply involved cooperation with those churches of COCU to experience increased cooperation and unity , and to gain clearer and fuller insights through worship, study, fellowship, and action, so that there will be steady and determined progress toward full union. The Executive Council is directed, in consultation with the UCC delegates to COCU and with the Commission on Christian Unity. to seek to mobilize full support throughout our communion for the COCU process, particularly as it seeks new directions in experimental processes of growing together.
6. The Ninth General Synod declares that *regional and local ecumenism* are basic and fundamental ingredients of the life of the Church and affirms that theological sensitivity and competence are needed ingredients in the ecumenical life of ail churches everywhere. The Ninth General Synod urges that United Church of Christ members and agencies participate fully in regional and local ecumenical expressions so that all of our members may have local experiences of the ecumenical movements.
7. The Ninth General Synod values its association with the member churches of the *World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational)*, and appreciates the opportunities for study and deepening friendships which membership offers. As the time of financial stringency continues, and as other ecumenical needs seem more pressing, our financial commitment to the W ARC must rank lower than our commitment to the Consultation on Church Union, the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of the Churches of Christ.
8. The Ninth General Synod affirms, as recommended policy for Ministry and Mission related o the United Church of Christ, a continuation of its commitment to exploring the possibility of planning and conducting new projects and new programs with one or more of our partner communions.
9. The Ninth General Synod requests the Council on Mission Priorities to review and evaluate programs funded by the Executive Council, Instrumentalities, Commissions and other agencies of the United Church of Christ, including Conferences, using criteria which will reflect the priority judgments of the Ninth General Synod, including its commitment to ecumenical responsibility; and requests the Council on Mission Priorities to report to the Tenth General Synod. The following paragraphs are referred to the Executive Council and the Commission on Christian Unity and Ecumenical Study and Service for consideration, and the Executive Council is directed to address these recommendations with utmost seriousness.
10. We reaffirm the *constitutional mandate* of the Commission on Christian Unity and Ecumenical Study and Service, believing that the United Church of Christ needs such a Commission as an expression of our steadfast purpose to be a uniting church and as a constant reminder of that

priority objective.

- a. We request the Executive Council, in consultation with the Commission, to appoint an administrative secretary who would assist in the coordination of ecumenical participation by the United Church of Christ; gather data concerning ecumenical development; assist the Commission on Christian Unity in fulfilling its constitutional requirements; implementing Commission decisions and researching important questions. The Ecumenical Officer should have the freedom of movement in our communion associated with our chief instrumentality executives, including service on such boards and committees necessary to represent our ecumenical stance and commitment.
- b. Having declared our intent to enhance the development of commitment to ecumenism throughout our communion, particularly in regional and local settings, we, therefore, direct the Commission to develop a *style of operation* on an experimental basis during the next biennium which will include establishing ad hoc major-issue working groups on a regional basis, the membership to include: members and consultants of the Commission living in the particular region, representative theologians and ecumenical staff in the particular region, and others who can represent regional and local perspectives, expenses to be paid by the Commission.
- c. *We direct the Commission* to undertake a study of the effects of our communion's merger after fifteen years; to examine our communion's Constitution and By-laws and the constitutions, by-laws, operating procedures, and rules of instrumentalities, conferences, and associations to discover possible stumbling blocks to ecumenical cooperation and church union; to disseminate for study throughout the whole church the insights of black theology; and to study methods for our whole church which would encourage dialogue and cooperative action with other world religions.
- d. In order to *facilitate communications* between the Commission and the Executive Council, we urge the Council to invite one Commission representative, chosen by the Commission, to attend meetings of the Executive Council with voice but not vote during the next biennium, expenses to be paid by the Executive Council, and we ask the Executive Council to designate its Vice-Chairperson to attend meetings of the Commission.
- e. We believe that there is need in the United Church of Christ for clearer ways by which our communion at all levels can sense *common agendas*, make critical decisions, and remain in constant communication, speaking the truth in love. We, therefore, direct the Nominating Committee and the Executive Council for subsequent biennia, working with the President's Office and in consultation with the Commission, to select members and consultants on the Commission in accordance with by-law provisions for equitable distribution of ministers, laymen, laywomen, and youth, and from:
 - the UCC delegations to each nation or world ecumenical organization

- theological schools to which our communion relates
- a variety of local and regional ecumenical agencies in each region
- the Council on Mission Priorities
- the Council of Instrumentality Executives

expenses to be paid by the Commission.

- f. To insure the continuing inter-relationship of the Commission on Christian Unity with the interests of the Commissions on Worship and Theology, we recommend the Executive Council, in consultation with the Commission, appoint at least one member of the Commission to a consultant relationship with the Office for Leadership Development, expenses to be paid by the Commission.
11. We request the Executive Council, Officers of the communion, agency executives, conference ministers, interdenominational agencies at all levels, and pastors to insure a *regular flow of materials and information*, pertaining to ecumenical relations and experiences, to the Commission and from it to the whole church. We request the Office of Communication, in consultation with the Commission, to devise a communication system which will enable the sharing of information and recommendations concerning our communion's commitment to ecumenism at all levels, sharing of the happenings of ecumenism everywhere and seeking to counter the negative impressions so often found in media.
 12. We direct the Commission on Christian Unity, in cooperation with the Office of the President and the Council on Mission Priorities and the Planning and Correlation Committee of the Executive Council to develop *a system for policy planning*, criteria setting, and evaluation of ecumenical relationships, commitment, and agencies.
 13. We instruct the *Committee on Structural Planning* of the Executive Council, one, to conduct its studies in accordance with the above policy statements and in consultation with the Commission on Christian Unity, and, two, to recommend procedures, programs, and structural changes to affirm the policy and to achieve maximum impact of United Church of Christ resources.
 14. Further, we recommend that the Commission on Christian Unity publish and distribute a *resource file* on ecumenical expressions of mission and unity, including policy guidelines and processes for the seventies, the budget to be provided from Priority Funds in 1974, and we request that the Office of Communications and the Stewardship Council assist the Commission in developing and distributing the resource file to the churches.